

Georgia

THE MAGAZINE FOR TODAY'S GEORGIAN

OCTOBER 1973
ONE DOLLAR

A Love Song to The Fabulous Fox





A highly personalized excursion within America's final surviving superbigtime movie theater in the near certain knowledge that the Fox is an endangered species. An outrageously detailed tour by a special breed of pre-war, pre-TV Foxgoer who recalls it all.

A Love Song to The Fabulous Fox

By William Hedgepeth/ Illustrations by John Findley

"In our big modern movie palaces there are collected the most gorgeous rugs, furniture and fixtures that money can produce. No kings or emperors have wandered through more luxurious surroundings. In a sense, these theaters are social safety valves in that the public can partake of the same luxuries as the rich and use them to the same full extent."

—from "American Theaters of Today," 1929

"You may take with you the satisfaction that proceeds from consciousness of duty faithfully performed."

—Lee at Appomattox

A hhhh yes, step right in. Step right on in here, friends. I just want you to roll your eyes and wrap your minds around this mighty thing. I want you to come inside and tarry a moment to behold the fluid and limitless mystification of it all. For here looms a vast eye-filling fabrication contrived exclusively to catapult the imagination into the benign unknown: a fantastical miasma *poofed*, as it were, from Aladdin's lamp: Far too preposterous, enchanted, hypnotic, gaudy, phony and lovely to be anything other than Good and True. And it's all right here for you. To Do. And what you do is, you step right on inside to pause and peruse this incredible edifice in all its multitudinous unfoldings.

But before that, you should first try to grasp the full scope of this colossus from a respectful distance, far back enough to encompass its enormitude. For it is, as you know, the absolute biggest one still in existence anywhere — that is, if you don't count the Radio City Music Hall. And why should you count that anyway? THIS, after all, is the one-and-only and never-to-be-repeated of its kind, a super-Xanadu of unequalled sumptuousness inside and out. Hence it is that you should approach these hallowed grounds with nothing less than the proper spirit of astoundment and piety.

From the outside what you see is a prodigious structure the size of a city block, built of cream and buff bricks laid in horizontal ribbons all the way around. There are, indeed, one (1) zillion (count 'em) bricks that comprise the main building and then proceed thereafter, as you see, to form themselves into exotical mosquelike shapes, arches, spires and slender Moorish minarets.

The overall architectural style, one might note, is your basic neo-Baroque Roccoco Islamic Egyptian Byzantine (with those ever-popular overtones of Turkey), all topped off, as any good mosque should be, with a distinctively Hollywood-sized Orientalized onion

dome — which seems to have tarnished a mildewy green after 44 years in the Georgia sun. But it's still up there! Still up there!

Yea and verily, this is THE Fox Theater, if you please. One of America's final surviving superbtime celestial and splendiferous cinema cathedrals of yore... This garden of your every delight... This metaphysical vision of voluptuousness and grandiosity such as you've thus far glimpsed only in dreams, and only fleetingly, and yet have always yearned to return to. Here it reigns: Atlanta's very own Fox, the Fox of Foxes. And I do mean to tell you it is one *faaaaaaancy* mutha!

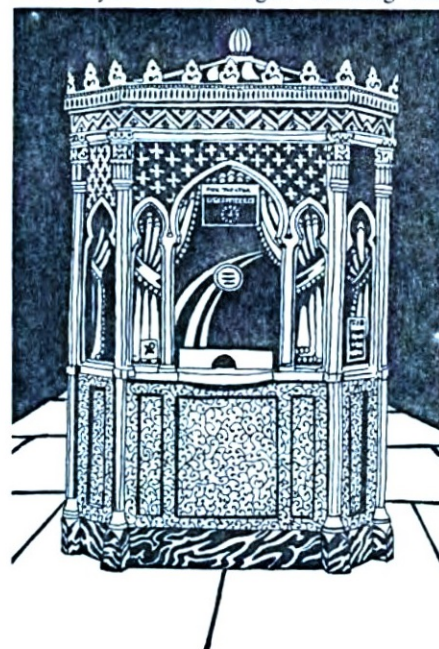
Come to think of it, it was my Mother who must have introduced me to the Fox. I don't remember exactly when, but it was sometime back in the pre-TV era, back when movie theaters were more vital bonds in the overall social fabric. If nothing else, the movies in those days held greater numbers of people together in the common experience of getting out of their individual skins to become part of whatever was playing before them. Or at least that's the way my friends and I always felt it on those fairly frequent afternoons that my Mother would ferry us all to the show.

The subject of all of this, however, is not me but this giant cathedral to Moviedom. Even so, it remains true that all theaters, and most especially theaters of this gaudy-gargantuan *genre*, are actually (when you get right down to it) very private if not somewhat sacred tabernacles that exist solely to renew and sustain a person's individual illusions. To take the Theater Trip is to enter into an essentially solitary sort of experience wherein you sit in darkness, mostly silent, not looking at anybody else, and, for that brief time being, set your mind free to frolic and identify with the lights that dance and flicker on the screen. In that context, the Fox has always been a Super Trip. What with everything about it being so clearly put there just to razzle and bedazzle you, the Fox was — and is — a sort of standing invitation to foist yourself straightaway into some kind of fantasy. And obviously fantasies, and the settings for those fantasies, are the most essentially personal experiences that can be had. All of which gets around to saying that for me the Fox is one vast personalized sensation. For me it is abstract, decorative, mythological and entirely lifted out of time and space. Maybe it's that way for you too.

You enter this pleasure dome beneath banks of running lights that stream

along in beckoning insinuations across the great marquee as well as up and down the upright sign that towers high above the sidewalk and asserts — in bold electric characters that dominate perhaps a six-block area — "F-O-X."

Once past the ticket booth, which itself is shaped a little like the Alhambra, there unfolds a terrazzo-tiled entrance hall trimmed with Moorish folderol and featuring displays for coming attractions. Various doors along the sides lead to other establishments housed in the same building. One wide set of doors, for instance, leads up to the Egyptian Ballroom, which was intended originally as the temple and ritual stomping ground (or whatever it is they do) for the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. It was these mystics who began building the



mosque in 1927, later to be joined by William Fox — of 20th Century Fox — who added the theater to his chain of about 10 super-Foxes around the country. All of them were in the upwards-of-4,500-seat class, and all of them were nearly always filled to capacity. This particular structure cost \$5½-million, a considerable outlay even in the movie craze days. Atlanta's Fox began life on Christmas Day, 1929, with a live, on-stage performance of "Beach Nights" by Fanchon & Marco and their Sunkist Beauties.

Even today, once inside the main lobby, you can see that all the furnishings emanate a sense of indefatigable finery... as well as a pretentiousness so utterly outrageous that it can only be regarded with the same degree of respect due to whatever vaguely royal sort of thing that all of this is purporting itself to be. It shore ain't like noth-

ing else. Lo, it's a little bit of Karnak on Peachtree, with a dash of Taj Mahal and the mildly berserk solemnity of a pseudo-Islamic mosque.

There's just such an overwhelming aura of fastidiousness and *energy* in this main lobby, what with all the chandeliers, glass mosaics, lace-like scrollery, carvings of mythical creatures and mysterious shapes plus zig-zags and rosettes repeated endlessly. Above each of the dozen doors from the entrance hall into the lobby are indented silhouettes of minarets inlaid with Islamic designs, while encircling the lobby itself is a double band of intricate filigree made of 14-karat gold. "Islam," incidentally, means "submission" on the part of the individual soul to the will of Allah — or, as is the case here, to the whim of some other big mogul.

Putting out from one of the walls is a one-time fountain of delicately-colored tile. The basin is now filled with dirt, on top of which presently rests an aquarium wherein indifferent goldfish swim around a steady stream of bubbles that makes a low sputtering sound. Big urns nearby roost in fancy gold-foliated alcoves made especially for their presence, which is totally non-functional and senseless. All of this is so blatantly positioned here to beguile and discombobulate... or in any case, it's not like anything anyone's ever seen or partaken of anywhere else on the Planet Earth. Then, too, there's all this sumptuous and absolutely noiseless carpeting. I used to imagine that this carpet muffled sounds of fabulous dungeons deep underneath. It's impossible to hear footsteps on this carpet, no matter how many people are out here tromping around.

The lobby is agog tonight with patrons, all of whom — but for one or two — are black. Here's a swarm of black movie buffs coming, going or milling about the circular candy concession in a welter of loud, floppy caps and berets and shades and assorted plumage. It so happens that the feature playing here this week is one of the first "blaxploitation" flicks ever to grace the titanic Fox screen. Most of these moviegoers, therefore, are relatively new to this place; and yet everyone is eminently respectful toward it, for these exotic surroundings remain undeniably mysterious and still quite capable of generating unadulterated awe, bordering on sheer stupefaction, within the heart of the lone beholder.

This auditorium, for instance, is not just another decompression chamber for the soul; it is nothing less than a spacious and elegantly fortified court-

yard within some ethereal city. Along each side tower great castellated walls of stone with parapets, battlements, balconies and little barred windows glowing amber from inside (windows through which you cannot help but half expect at any moment to catch an abrupt glimpse of some furtive turbaned head ducking). The side walls run up to the corners of the stage and then join together way high up overhead with a gently-arched stone bridge lined with amber lanterns. Above all this stretches the nighttime sky dotted with shimmering stars and clouds that laze along slowly. The effect, altogether, is of an amphitheater imbued with the gay unreality of a fairy tale, and yet oddly impressive. You know you're somewhere important! At least that's the way it almost always was for all those thinly-clad souls who frequented the Fox and other such palaces back in those days when "The Moovies" meant a whole 'nother way of seeing the world.

In the old days, "some type of prologue would be given before each picture," recalls "Whit" Whitaker. "We could perform any kind of effects. Like, let's say we were showing 'Singing in the Rain.' Well, backstage there's a huge metal cyclorama that can be lowered. It's studded with lights that can be turned on in any combination. So we'd have this cyclorama as a backdrop with stars or clouds projected on it. Maybe a moon coming up. And we'd have, for instance, a girl decked out in flowers swinging in a swing. The orchestra would be playing and she'd be swinging while she sang 'Singing in the Rain.' And when she got through, see, the lights would go down and she'd be lowered below the stage level just as the movie would start."

Mr. Whitaker is a portly and forceful old man of the theater trade who managed the Fox during a portion of its prime — which is to say, during part of the 30's and 40's. "If you could just imagine that orchestra pit with a hundred men in it!" he exclaims, and his eyes glaze over in a thousand-yard stare.

In the most gilded of the golden days, "before the war," regular vaudeville acts were included as part of what you'd get with each movie. But even in the latter 40's, when I became a Fox-goer, you still got a hefty serving for the price of admission. Not only would you be greeted with a fine, first-run picture but also a cartoon, a newsreel, previews and perhaps also a short subject plus a "Fox Quotation for the Day." And then, as if all that were not enough, sud-

denly... *Da-Daaaa!*... up from the depths would rumble that monster Möller organ — all lit up, flashing and sparkling like the mouth of Hell itself — from which would erupt a medley of cheerful tunes everyone could sing as they followed the bouncing ball. "Noplace," insists Mr. Whitaker, "can put on the kind of show they can put on here."

* * *

Is the organ going to be played tonight? "Naw," answers one of the candy girls, "not with this movie."

The main floor — which alone seats more than the total capacity of any other theater in town — is maybe one-fifth filled tonight. For this reason the balcony is roped off and closed for this



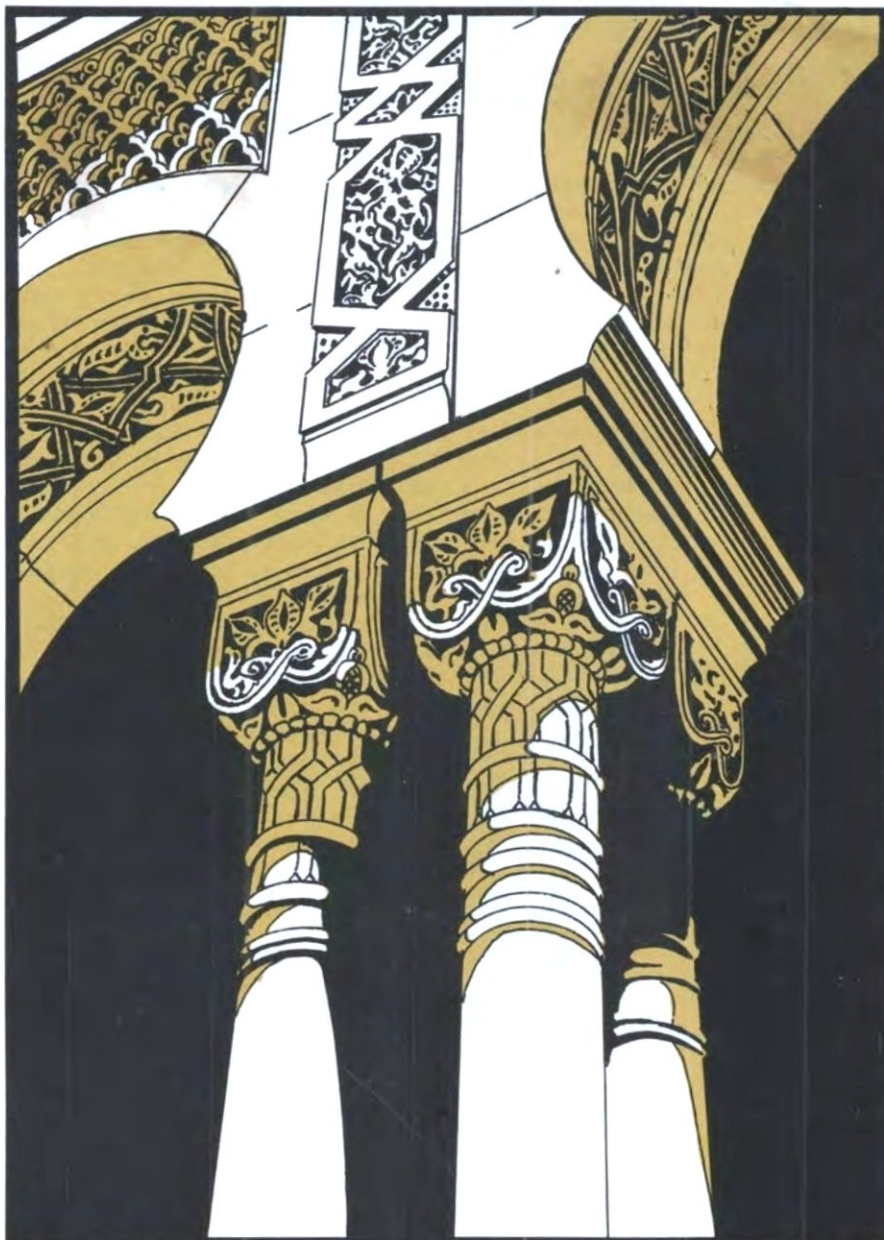
performance. But I go up anyway. On either side of the central openings into the auditorium (there are no doors between the lobby and the main floor) there's a plushly-carpeted staircase leading upward, each one wide enough to accommodate a trio of adult elephants abreast. These stairs ascend to the balcony mezzanine which is softly illuminated at all times by a Turkish-looking chandelier plus small lanterns interspersed along the walls, all glowing amber. Everything up here is ominously silent and distinctly Moorish with vaulted arches crisscrossing the ceiling. There's an arched entranceway or lurk-

ing alcove for every chair, sofa and cigarette urn, in addition to still other mysterious and empty nooks intended originally for God only knows what.

On the far right of the mezzanine is the "Men's Lounge" (bathroom) with elegant brass fixtures on all the sinks and urinals. But I've seen all this before. The "Ladies Lounge" on the opposite end, however, is something really unearthly — or in any case, it's someplace I've never been. One enters (that is, women enter) through a pillared portal across the top of which stretches a winged scarab in relief. And suddenly you're in Nefertiti's tomb. Here are wall paintings of Egyptian ladies plus all manner of chimeras and hieroglyphics. Yea, brother, and a fireplace and big sofas with ring-nosed lions on the ends of their arms. Every niche, corner and alcove is peopled with deities or other artifacts designed to further disconnect you from the outer world and make you feel vaguely idolatrous. Here and there the stucco has cracked and little shards of plaster have crumbled from portions of the sculpted ceiling. In one corner, another antique device: "YOUR WEIGHT AND FORTUNE. How Much Do You Weigh? One Cent. Guard Your Health (No Springs)."

On up another flight of stairs is a smaller balcony foyer designated for the Dress Circle, whoever they are. This is a somewhat more sedate and intimate lounging area carpeted in muted reds and silvers and quietly lit by surreal hues of amber from a line of Persian lanterns on upright stalks. Along the walls are little stall-like alcoves in each of which lolls a richly-fat armchair, usually of velvet. Fine. Fine. Fine. And totally detached. Night or day, it's always the same at this altitude: A sense of being impervious to the passage of time and forever shielded from the grim glare of the outer world, or anything else remotely connected to pale and daily realities. At the far end of this uppermost mezzanine, through another set of elaborate archways, stand silent elevators. Not in service.

From this Dress Circle foyer another pair of staircases carries you up, up into the starlit darkness and then — lo and behold — out into what surely must be one of the most humonderous balconies currently available to modern man. From this topmost perch the balcony slopes down at a fairly steep angle and appears distinctly larger than a football field laid crosswise. Stretching out above the upper third of the balcony is a striped-and-tasselled canopy that billows outward like a sheik's tent that's



been opened out for guests. There are seven descending aisles, all visible by lines of tiny lights on the ends of each row of seats. There's no one in the balcony.

Coming from just below the rearmost edge of the tented canopy (which is actually made of poured concrete), long white beams streak far down through the great dark expanse and finally connect with the screen. . . .

. . . I have now trailed those beams all the way down to the stage—or at least as close as I can get—and am now peering almost straight up at the screen from deep inside a dark enclosure. I am below stage level in the orchestra pit sitting rather nervously aboard the stool of the mighty world-bursting Möller Deluxe. I only hope to God this thing doesn't take a notion to rise up to the surface right now. It can do practically everything else: choral voices, solo instruments, a whole string section, or storm noises or bells or flutes

or something called "crash" and "Grand Crash."

From this vantage point the auditorium is at its most awesomely immense. Above this orchestra pit, perhaps a hundred feet straight up, is the archway bridge, and then above that looms all that vasty starlit spaciousness, sliced through the middle by projected beams from somewhere far away. From this site I get disquieting new glimmerings of the utter stupendosity of it all—and of the plain absurdity that such a place as this should even exist in this efficient-minded day and time. It's downright humbling to take account of the fact that all this passionate detail and pomp and eerie magnificence was once decreed solely for the exhilaration and spiritual uplifting of mortal man. Even now I feel spooked by the enormitude. I have that queasy *diminished* sensation that comes from the awareness of being a single small critter inside some yawning creation that's at least seven times bigger than it oughta be.

I leave the organ by means of a small door opening into one of the semi-darkened catacomb passageways which wind and intersect like a labyrinth beneath the auditorium. As I step through the door, two freshly-hired teenage ushers, making their first flash-lit exploration into these bowels, scream and start to run until I call to them that it's O.K.

It is, after all, outright spectral way down here, wandering along these long halls lined with unmarked black doors that shut with an echoed boom. Leading off these passageways are multitudinous rooms for use by the various technicians consigned to man the electrical and mechanical devices that make this entire Leviathan breathe and move. A low whooshy hum from something (something possibly unspeakable) gusts along these tunnels.

Here are two long-unused screening rooms for previewing films, dozens of dressing rooms for actors and opera singers; a wig room; a laundry room; storage rooms; bathrooms; locked rooms; rooms with mechanisms inside that hum or whir.

All at once here unfolds a great subterranean chamber that looks like the engine room of an ocean liner with enormous pipes and ducts reaching out in all directions and a 375-ton air conditioning unit droning away. Farther back into another cavern stand three gigantic boiler-type furnaces, each about half the length of a locomotive. Adjacent to these are two huge coalbin rooms, although the furnaces now feed on gas. Deeper back into the darkness are stacked hundreds of large olive-drab cans containing Civil Defense provisions, all of it long past the last date of effectiveness.

"This is all pretty old-type stuff down here," claims Mr. Ragsdale. As he says this, he throws a switch that starts up a cylindrical fanblade large enough to serve as the paddle wheel of an old Mississippi riverboat. It will completely recirculate the air in the auditorium every minute.

Mr. Ragsdale is 65 and has been working as an electrician here in the Fox since Social Security cards were first issued. "I'll be ready to retire come this September," he says. Mr. Ragsdale shows me three dormant generators designed for running certain mechanisms no longer being used. Here's another room filled with something the size of a small car which sends air up through the organ pipes. After this we visit the Power Room. This is the energy center for the whole shebang and is carefully locked at all times. A low phantom murmur constantly reverberates from within. When the Fox was built it had more available electricity than the city of Greenville, Mr. Ragsdale says. He shows me three incoming power

sources, each coming from a different electrical generating plant so as to minimize the possibility of failure. "In that storm not long ago," he notes, "everything was out of power all over town except the Fox Theater." The electricity has never once gone off. There is, however, a certain red button way down here in this softly humming nerve center of a room which, if pushed, activates a motor that starts up another bigger motor that produces the muscle to throw a giant switch that breaks all the circuits and completely shuts off the power of the Fox for good. I am cautioned not to touch it. This one button would terminate all those wry, fanciful illusions in the courtyard-amphitheater upstairs. Indeed, all this heavy stuff underneath—these big mechanical contraptions, compressors, hydraulic stage lifts and electrical apparatuses—all this dank, plodding machinery exists here simply for the sustained production of dream sensations and wispy atmospheric effects contrived to tantalize and beguile. Way down here in the mouldering dimness of these lurid caverns, far from the slightest sound of whatever's playing above, the whole thing seems more scary than ever: This deliberately silent giant building drawing power and producing illusion purely through the chemistry of its emanations. It's a living organism, a solid, Brobdingnagian entity whose moving parts all seem to know what they're here for. Everything works.

"Theaters just used to be so marvelous! Everything was so fantastic! I remember big beautiful theaters in Providence, Rhode Island; Chicago; New York; all over the place. The studios spent huge sums of money on those theaters. And of course they used to just pack the people in. Oh yes, I used to see all kinds of remarkable things. See, in the summer you'd be just burning up and you'd go into a nice cool theater, and they'd have not only a movie but a vaudeville show, and you'd get to see all the stars. I've seen 'em all!"

These are the reminiscences of a first-class authority and *afficionado* of the movie world who has partaken of the finest cinema palaces throughout the land, most particularly during the heyday of old-time Hollywood. This expert is, in fact, my Mother, whose recollections and editorial comments I taped over the telephone unbeknownst to her (which is the way I understand things are done nowadays).

"I used to go to one nearly every day when I was traveling," she says,

and then laughs a little at the very thought of it. "Well sure; you know you didn't have television or anything else. You could go to a wonderful thing in a theater for a quarter; fifty cents, tops. I mean how could you spend a better couple of hours? Go into a cool theater and eat some good popcorn and sit there and see a good, wonderful movie. And during the Depression they used to give dishes away in lots of places. You'd get all kinds of free stuff for going to the movie.

"It was always so delightful. And it was a *dream* world, see. No wonder people in the Depression loved to go, if they could scrape up the money. Because there they could see things that were wonderful and good, and for a short while they could live in their fantasy world and get away from all the troubles of the outside. So in those days studios made light, airy, cheerful things. And good, wonderful things that inspired people. Why, they could write



stories to inspire you to fight a war or to do anything! Movies used to be so great! Better than today's movies. Of course today they don't make things that are pleasant to see. You go and you feel more depressed coming out of one of those things than when you went in.

"Before, with the old star system, they had so many people under contract who they were paying weekly anyway that the studios were just turning out stories constantly. And of course they had a ready market for it. Everybody

was going to theaters, the attendance was something terrific, the stock was booming. It was during the war that I put money in 20th Century Fox. I think I bought it at 13 and it went up to sixty. Today I don't think it's worth anything but I sold it and made money. Everything was so great."

She pauses a brief beat or two in this almost-nonstop oration. "No," she says, "I wouldn't predict that big theaters, those big castles, will ever come back. It's pathetic. You know, these things are *invaluable*, and when you just go tearing them down, replacing them with some cheap old all-glass building, which they're doing... I mean, I think the people have just gone nuts! They were the central thing before television. For instance, in Atlanta there were no nightclubs, and that was in the 30's. And so with none of that—with no home entertainment, no bowling alleys, no Lake Lanier, nothing—the main entertainment... THE main entertainment... was theaters."

The Fox operates today with a near-skeleton crew of 45, several of whom have been here for most of the theater's life. The present manager, however, is a tall, bushy-headed 28-year-old named Mike Spirtos who claims he'll probably be "the last manager of the last of the great palaces." It's all been wasting away lately, he says. "It's still in great shape but it's just too costly to make repairs. This place needs to make at least \$7,000 a week just to break even." Mike talks wistfully of the days when there were nearly a hundred people on the staff. "But every year you eliminate things you did the year before just to break even."

Next week, however, something new will be taking place. The Fox will stage a revival of "King Kong," for which Mike will don a gorilla suit to lope around the aisles and foyers. Then, too, they've begun presenting kiddie shows and midnight shows and week-end rock shows here. "Anything's possible at the Fox," he proclaims. "It's all a great big fantasy... just *being* here."

Elsewhere throughout the cavernous old palace the older hands persist along as if everything were under some indefinite death sentence. "I'm gonna hazard a guess it's got five, six years," shrugs the Projectionist. "It's outdated. But there's so many of us here... so many years."

I leave the projection booth and step outside the uppermost exit from the balcony, from which point I am high above, and across the street from, what was once Franklin Simon's. The night

continued on page 39



sky out here smacks of toxic gasses. About two blocks away towers a bland and glassy highrise. Through dozens of sliding glass doors comes the fatal glow of TV sets and shadows of people pinned to their chairs. It is, in one fell swoop, a glimpse of the spirit of contemporary humanity: cowed and graceless. Palpable tensions and truly titanic passions are just so much harder to come by over a TV tube. It may be an advance in technology but it's a setback for the overall cause of civilization. And as for movies on TV... well, you just can't get off on 'em, you know? It's such a diminishment of scope. You're actually bigger than the screen. That's just unnatural. Lilliput in triumph!

Less than a mile past this highrise, farther down Peachtree, the Powers That Be have just excavated the rubble of the Roxy, once the third largest of Atlanta's old movie palaces. Across from that stands the nondescript thing that took up where the old Paramount, the second-largest, went down in 1960. A block farther down from that stands the Loew's. But not for much longer. Another wonderful plasticated antiseptic hotel is a-comin', sooner than you think.

Such is the modern day fate of those special realms where fantasy once reigned and united us all to worship: the Granadas, Strands, Rivolis, Tivolis, Bijous, Majestics, Orientals, Roxys. They've all succumbed to TV or been replaced by boxy little storefront theaters comfortably ensconced out in suburbia — drab, fibreglass and earth-bound.

Nonetheless, it's with a faded but stubborn grandeur that *this*, the kingfish of all movie palaces is still holding forth... still full of spirits and shadows of forgotten acts.

* * *

Backstage, behind the curtains and the screen, Mr. Sam Taylor, 65, sits beside the Fox's main control panel. "I haven't seen a movie in I don't know when. I listen to all of 'em."

This Board, which is olive green and about the size of a garage door, features approximately 400 rheostat levers and large toggle switches in addition to all sorts of dials & lights plus a steering wheel, jutting straight out, which is the "master dimmer." All the everyday miracles of lighting and levitation and all-around illusory beguilement are controlled from this board. Here are switches labeled "ceiling stars"... "cloud effects"... "auto sunrise (and sunset) control"... "sunlight effect spots"... and so on and on.

A red light flashes along with a

buzzer. "That's it," sighs Mr. Taylor as he gets up and pulls a lever or two. The blaxploitation flick is finished for the night and the big silent curtains slide together across the stage and the house lights go up.

"Theaters this size are going out of business all over the country," Whit Whitaker observed earlier today. "For two reasons: product and expense. There are 100 screens in Atlanta and not enough pictures to go around. There were just 225 pictures made last year. You have to have a little theater and run 'em for a long time."

What with distributors demanding up to 90 percent of a theater's box office sales during the first two or three weeks of a film's run, it just makes more economic sense to show a film for months in a small house rather than pack all those same customers into the Fox in a mere week or two. Film distributors and greedy producers are the evil ones. They are the ones who condemn us to the cheesy, sleazy little mini-theaters that abound today. Concerned citizens groups should rise up and lay waste to these men's offices and to the places where they skulk and connive!

Mr. Whitaker says he thinks the Fox "could continue as a beautiful entertainment edifice for Atlanta." But he notes that the place has already been surveyed by architects to determine whether it could be converted on its present foundation into a highrise motel... or if it will be necessary to raze and totally flatten the place. They decided upon the latter course.

Mr. Whitaker drifts into reverie. Scenes seem to begin unreeling on a screen someplace behind his eyes. He talks of the days when there were over fifty ushers — "white gloves, shined shoes, everything perfect about their uniforms. And the organ operated at every show..."

The big backstage switchboard could do it all. And that red button deep down in the Power Room could do it all in, as swiftly as a magician flinging his cloak around his body and vanishing forever.

* * *

So step right up! Step right into this colossal sanctuary to the eye of the soul, to the era of glorious mendacity and daily miracles and people whose lives are enlarged by it all.

Here we are at the "Fabulous Fox" once again. Big limousines are discharging their passengers out on the sidewalk, beneath the great marquee. Big spotlights are reaching around in the evening sky. People are pouring by the hundreds upon hundreds into this palace of lavish unrealities and fan-

tastical imaginings: Young people, old people, people in tuxedos and families with children, brilliantined young fellows and flappers and hippies and on and on... all with magic in their eyes, all being swiftly whisked to their seats by immaculate ushers. More and more souls flow in off the streets, out of all that cacophonous urban clatter and grime and crime and slow smogulation. And they become swiftly transformed into something larger than whatever they once were. The place is resplendent and a gleam and extraterrestrial. The fountains are fixed again and the gold-filigreed lobby glows with a splendid antique glitteration.

For here — once again and forevermore — lords this celestial city, this palatial facade of incomparable elegance and wondrous phantasmagorical effects evoked entirely on behalf of all these toil-worn men and women whose outside day-to-ordinary-day dreams never quite seem to come true. They come here for strength and rest... for the hopeful triumph of suppressed desires and a renewal of their most vital illusions. It is, after all, the sacred and traditional function of a theater to be theatrical: to delight, enthrall, unfurl all its manifest flying wonders and, in general, to uplift the lone traveler from the daily pains of man and the earth's misfortune. For, yea, it is this gaudy booming edifice alone which possesses the One Great Secret of all artistic manifestation: the secret that Truth is entirely and absolutely a matter of style and elegant impossible bamboozlement.

So here we sit right at this moment — my Mother, my Father, my Son and myself — sitting here among the throngs of souls inhabiting this capacious temple. There is a respectful silence.

Now the lights dim. And now they flare up again to the opening strains of a hundred-piece orchestra. And all at once here is the incredible sight of a single young girl... a girl bedecked in flowers and butterflies, swinging and smiling against a backdrop of fancy projected illusions. She is about to sing. Suddenly green sparks go off behind my eyes. Suddenly I leap to my feet and scramble across people's laps to the aisle. Now I am charging full-speed toward the stage like the wildest of fools, arms outspread and face teared over with full-flushed ecstasy.

And I vault clear across the orchestra pit and over the footlights and onto the stage where I embrace this creature in a fit of joy and kiss her cheeks and whisper lovingly into her ears, "God bless you, Lady, I'm glad you're still here!"